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C O N F I D E N T I A L SOFIA 000482

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TAGS: [MARR](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KPAO](#) [BU](#)
SUBJECT: MILITARY BASING: MEDIA BATTLE SHIFTS IN THE RIGHT
DIRECTION

REF: SOFIA 0454

Classified By: Ambassador John Beyrle for reasons 1.4 a and d.

11. (SBU) SUMMARY. After the March 24 announcement (reftel) that the U.S. and Bulgaria had reached agreement on text for the Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA), Bulgarian officials at all levels have come out in support of the agreement. Continuing Embassy public diplomacy efforts, combined with this official support, has resulted in greatly improved press coverage. We continue to monitor all public statements closely to ensure they reflect agreed language. END SUMMARY.

Bulgarian Officials and Media "On Message"...

12. (SBU) Following agreement on text for the Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA) which was announced on March 24 (reftel), Bulgarian officials at the national, regional, and local levels are now speaking out more frequently in favor of the agreement. Since the announcement, there has been a noticeable increase in favorable press coverage regarding the proposed U.S. presence at Bulgarian military facilities. In a major shift, Trud, the largest circulation Bulgarian daily newspaper, has come out in support of the agreement.

13. (SBU) As part of the Embassy's ongoing public affairs outreach program, the Ambassador met with local officials of municipalities located near the Novo Selo Training Area and Bezmer Air Base March 6-8 to brief them on the agreement. Some of these mayors and regional governors have replayed the positive, factual information from these briefings in press interviews with national news organizations--sometimes virtually verbatim.

14. (SBU) In a national radio interview March 26, Georgi Georgiev, mayor of the municipality of Tundzha, said, "There will be no U.S. military bases in Bulgaria." After taking the opportunity to correctly point out that these will be joint bases, the mayor went on to highlight the economic benefits of the bases while downplaying fears of terrorist attacks, pollution, and nuclear weapons.

...While Opponents Beat the Drum

15. (U) On March 22, the ultra-nationalist Ataka party began a petition campaign against the agreement with the goal of collecting 500,000 signatures and 60 votes in Parliament to force a national referendum on the DCA. Under Bulgarian law, national referenda can only be ordered by the President, the Council of Ministers, or a vote by one quarter of Parliament--60 out 240 votes. With only 14 seats in Parliament and no other parties sympathetic to the referendum

campaign, Ataka's chances for success are remote. Ataka leader Volen Siderov told Bulgarian television April 4 that a copy of the petition would be delivered to the U.S. Embassy in Sofia and that "we are drawing up a letter to the U.S. Congress to inform them of the real public attitudes regarding the deployment of military bases in this country."

¶6. (C) COMMENT. Now that they have seen the agreed text, Bulgarian government and military officials are publicly promoting the benefits and dispelling the myths that grew up around the agreement. In the aftermath of Ataka's failure to derail the negotiations, its petition campaign is designed as much to retain visibility for the party as to scuttle the agreement, recognizing that the ruling coalition easily has enough votes to approve. We continue to monitor all public statements closely to ensure they reflect agreed language.
END COMMENT.
Beyrle